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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001767

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BA](#) [REFORM](#) [ECTRD](#) [BILAT](#) [OFFICIALS](#) [POL](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES UPCOMING LEGISLATION WITH  
PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER AL DHAHRANI

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) The Ambassador November 27 spoke with Council of Representative (COR - elected lower house of parliament) Speaker Khalifa Al Dhahrani about the legislative agenda for the current session. Al Dhahrani explained that the COR had decided to hold a series of extraordinary sessions to address outstanding bills; first on the agenda is the labor reform law. Al Dhahrani expressed his view that a major issue such as dealing with expatriate labor should be addressed at the GCC level rather than in each individual country. He praised the public debate about a proposed personal status law, saying the opinions being voiced now should lead to a better law. Al Dhahrani hoped that the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would promote enhanced bilateral trade and investment relations, leading to more Bahraini jobs and increased prosperity. He stated that Bahrain's commitment to the U.S. Navy base in country was firm and strong. End Summary.

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Extraordinary Sessions to Discuss Bills  
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2. (C) The Ambassador called on COR speaker Al Dhahrani November 27 to discuss upcoming legislation and the FTA. In response to the Ambassador's question, Al Dhahrani said that labor reform legislation was the primary focus of extraordinary sessions scheduled by the COR to address outstanding bills. The Ambassador related that an MP had expressed his dissatisfaction with the labor reform bill, and the Ambassador had replied that if he did not like the draft, he should develop a counter-proposal. Al Dhahrani said it was normal for there to be opposition in parliaments, and often MPs speak publicly simply for public relations reasons. In his view, Dhahrani said, a major issue such as how to deal with expatriate labor should be addressed at a unified GCC level, not on a country-by-country basis.

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Positive Public Debate on Personal Status Law  
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3. (C) The Ambassador raised the proposed personal status law, stating that the prospect of a law had led to public affairs campaigns for and against, demonstrations, op-ed pieces and editorials, and sermons in the mosques. Al Dhahrani stated that thus far, the government had not delivered a draft of the law to parliament. The COR was currently busy with other laws and the personal status law would be addressed at the proper time. He commented, however, that the public debate over the law was positive, allowing for the public airing of all points of view. It allowed the MPs to consider the various opinions before having to address a draft law, which should result in a better law.

4. (C) Al Dhahrani said there was no urgency to pass the law quickly because the shariah courts were already performing their role and adjudicating personal status issues. A delay in addressing legislation did not mean the citizens would be forced to live without an important component of the judicial sector. There were differences of opinion between Sunnis and Shias on a law, and even within each community. Passing a personal status law would require agreement by all political blocs in the COR. He hoped that proposed legislation would reflect the aspirations of all Bahraini citizens.

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CT Law On Deck  
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5. (C) The Ambassador said that the draft counter-terrorism law would allow for better prosecution of terrorists, and asked about the status of the bill. Al Dhahrani said the COR would address this law immediately following debate of the labor reform law.

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FTA To Generate Jobs, Prosperity

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16. (C) The Ambassador thanked Al Dhahrani for the parliament's ratification of the FTA in July and briefed the Speaker on the current state of play in Congress. Al Dhahrani stated that the FTA would help strengthen the historically close relations between the U.S. and Bahrain. The King, Crown Prince, and Parliament all give special treatment to the relationship with the United States, and Bahrain appreciates the U.S. position on bilateral trade and investment links. Nothing threatens the safety of American citizens and investments in the Kingdom, and the government wants the USG to promote business opportunities in Bahrain. With greater investment, the economy will generate more jobs and increased prosperity.

17. (C) The Ambassador agreed, saying one of his priorities is to promote the commercial relationship. He noted that Economic Development Board CEO Shaikh Mohammed bin Issa would lead an American Chamber of Commerce in Bahrain trade mission to the U.S. soon. Al Dhahrani said there had been costs to pursuing the FTA with the United States, including Saudi Arabia's decision in summer 2004 to end a 50,000 barrel/day oil grant. But he was confident the FTA would prove to be beneficial for the Bahraini economy.

18. (C) Al Dhahrani said that Bahrain had always welcomed people of all nationalities, and hoped that the dependents of U.S. Navy personnel stationed in the Kingdom would be allowed to return soon. The Ambassador said the USG was looking at the possible future return of some of the dependents, but we continue to have concerns about possible threats in the country. Al Dhahrani said that the Navy was always welcome in Bahrain and the GOB's commitment to the base is firm and strong.

ZIADDEH